

Food Safety Advisory Committee Brainstorms to Keep Dining Safe

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Do you ever catch yourself pondering if it is safe to eat a food item at a restaurant? If so, you can rest assured that there are many people working together to ensure that food service establishments prepare their food in a safe way.

Contrary to popular belief, it is not only the local health department that works to improve food safety. There are many people in many different fields of food safety working together along with the health department to keep food safe.

The Secretary's Food Safety Advisory Committee held its semi-annual meeting in Wichita June 16-18. Members of the committee work together to encourage open communication among state and federal food protection representatives, and food safety stakeholders. Meetings were held for industry stakeholders on June 16, and for local regulators on June 17. Both meetings had the same agenda.



Assistant Secretary Doug Farmer gave the welcome address. Other speakers included Dr. Harshavardhan Thippareddi, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Lesa Roberts, KDHE Bureau of Consumer Health Director; Constantine Cotsoradis, Kansas Department of Agriculture; Mary Glassburner, KDHE FPCS Program Director; and Jeff Walker, KDHE Food Protection and Consumer Safety (FPCS) Quality Assurance Manager.

Lesla Roberts, program director for the Bureau of Consumer Health, kicked off both meetings with an explanation of Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius' Executive Reorganization Order. Roberts responded to questions and concerns asked by both stakeholders as well as state, federal and local food protection representatives.

Following Robert's presentation, Jeff Walker, quality assurance manager for the Kansas Department of Health and Environment Food Protection and Consumer Safety Program spoke on regulatory standards and *Kansas Baseline*.

Walker explained the different areas of compliance that Kansas' food establishments have improved upon as well as what needs attention. Topics included proper hand washing, proper hot and cold holding temperatures and date marking. Over all, Kansas is well above the national compliance average in many categories, but there is always room for improvements to be made.

The committee is made up of representatives from each branch of food safety ranging from the food producer to the consumer. Representatives include: education, state and federal food protection employees, restaurant owners, food producers and consumers. The secretary's meeting is supported by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and

been successful in making improvement and adjustments in food safety, including the adaptation of the 1999 Food Code and the revision of the Focus on Food Safety campaign.

Although many Kansas dining establishments are in compliance, it is important to continue to practice safe food handling. Dr. Harshavardhan Thippareddi from the University of Nebraska went over the most common and dangerous pathogens in the food industry such as e coli and listeria. Dr. Thippareddi explained how foodborne pathogens cause both health and financial concerns to food safety and how to guard against pathogens by safe cooking, hand washing and packaging practices.

In order to develop regulatory standards to guard against foodborne illness, it is important to define what is safe and unsafe handling. Mary Glassburner, KDHE Food Protection and Consumer Safety (FPCS) Program Director, discussed the recent National Conference for Food Protection. Glassburner went over many of the topics that were discussed at the conference and what steps are taken to put actions into effect. A few of the topics that were included in the conference that she attended pertained to developing federal guidance on preventing the transmission of Norovirus, establishing a committee on food allergens and defining "ready to eat food."

Once regulations have been made, they are not always carried out. In times where foodborne illness unfortunately occurs, it is important that food protection employees understand what they need to do and who to contact. Although food safety employees may know what their job entails, they often have little idea of what other food protection employees are responsible for.

Angela Kohls, contract manager for the FPCS program, facilitated a role-playing exercise for the meeting participants. Kohls gave each participant a role or job description that was different from his or her current food protection responsibility. The roles ranged from food service worker to Director of Consumer Health. The participants were then instructed that there had been a Hepatitis A outbreak at a nearby fast food establishment. Participants were to decide what their responsibility would be and who to contact. The purpose of the role-playing activity was for all participants to develop an understanding of what other food protection workers are responsible for during an outbreak.

In order to avoid outbreaks, it is important to educate food safety workers on proper food handling and preparation. Food safety workers are constantly working to brainstorm for new ideas on how to educate about food safety. In an effort to get some new thoughts on food safety education, participants were instructed to come up with their own unique food safety educational material. The results of the activity were extremely productive with ideas ranging from t-shirts to videos.

The next meeting will be held in December 2004. For more information, contact Ginny Ramseyer Winter at (785) 368-7261 or gramseyer@kdhe.state.ks.us.